DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 138 427 RC 009 884

AUTHOR	Sikand, Jack
TITLE	Native Studies Programs in Canada and the United States.
INSTITUTION	Brandon Univ. (Manitoba).
PUB DATE	30 Aug 76
NOTE	15p.
EDRS PRICE	MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Alaska Natives; *American Indians; *Canada Natives; Change Strategies; Classification; Communication (Thought Transfer); Cultural Background; Cultural Differences; *Definitions; *Educational Objectives; Essays; *Ethnic Studies; *Higher Education; Interdisciplinary Approach; Organization; Political Power; Program Development; Research Needs; Self Actualization; Self Concept
IDENTIFIERS	Canada; *Native Studies; United States

ABSTRACT

Defining Native studies programs in Canada and the U.S., this essay presents: (1) Rationale for Native Studies (recognition on the part of the majority of cultural differences; the emergence of an affirmative Native identity; and declining enrollments in colleges); (2) Structural Organization Alternatives (as part of an existing department; as an interdisciplinary program; as a separate degree-awarding department); (3) Goals (to provide cultural awareness for persons preparing to work among Native populations; to provide Native students with a sense of belonging and an indigenous belief system that would provide ethical moorings; to enable Native students to develop an identification with the formal educational system; to provide a forum for discussion of the solution to Native problems; to preserve and promote Native heritage; to promote non-partisan intellectual activity; to serve as an unofficial co-ordinator of other Native programs); (4) Recommendations (development of a Native studies periodical and professional conference to promote idea exchange; formation of a North American Native studies organization to facilitate development of a Native university and to exert political influence upon the administration of Native programs; encouragement/assistance to scholars in Native studies by government and industry; deliberate and courageous Native studies goal clarification/articulation; greater commitment to the academic aspects of Native studies). (JC)

****
* Documents acquired by ERIC include many informal unpublished *
* materials not available from other sources. ERIC makes every effort *
* to obtain the best copy available. Nevertheless, items of marginal *
* reproducibility are often encountered and this affects the quality *
* of the microfiche and hardcopy reproductions ERIC makes available *
* via the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). EDRS is not *
* responsible for the quality of the original document. Reproductions *
* supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made from the original. *
****

ED138427

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

DEPT. OF NATIVE STUDIES

RC009884

2

Brandon University **Brandon, Manitoba**

NATIVE STUDIES PROGRAMS
IN
CANADA AND THE UNITED STATES

- Jack Sikand

August 30, 1976

REASONS

In recent years, many colleges and universities in Canada have established native studies programs. This may partly be a recognition of the fact that the indigenous people of North America were not an inert element of the landscape before the period of immigration assaults from Europe. A concession is made that the natives of the continent made creative endeavours for thousands of years and developed cultures of a high order. Such efforts found expression in the evolvement of unique linguistic styles, articulation of religious philosophies, and the unfolding of exceptional art forms. Academics are reluctantly beginning to allow that a study of those activities and ideas is a legitimate part of education. It is also becoming obvious that despite the expectations of the dominant society, native people have not culturally merged with Euro-American institutions. They have survived on a distinct socio-cultural dimension of their own. In this, of course, they may have been much assisted by the negative attitudes of the larger society itself. In any case, institutionalized education has found it of interest to study the phenomenon of the North American native.

These interests of the academics have been accompanied by the emergence of a new posture among the native people. They have proclaimed a separate identity of their own. They no longer feel guilty for not having participated with greater devotion in the economic and educational activities of the larger society. They judge the prevailing system of education to be at fault for alienating the native child. Native Studies

programs are partly a political response to this assertiveness. In a few instances, native groups have set up their own educational institutions. There, of course, native studies seems to be a motivating force for the total program, providing the institution with a "cause", and a means of relating to the constituents. Other courses are studied for reasons of practicality, but native studies forms the soul of the total educational exercise.

Added to these reasons is the more mundane factor of declining enrolments at post-secondary institutions. Native people are seen as a source of clients, and native studies is used as an enticing agent. It may be speculated that smaller universities such as Trent, Laurentian, Brandon, Lethbridge in Canada, and those of the Dakotas and Montana in the United States are motivated by this expediency.

STRUCTURAL ORGANIZATION

Native Studies is a new academic discipline. There are no precedents to guide institutions either in the extensiveness of its scope, or the interest it might evoke among students. During this developmental stage of uncertainty, the following structural patterns seem to be followed by colleges and universities:

1. Part Of An Existing Department

Many colleges and universities have adopted native studies not as a separate discipline, but as part of one of the existing departments.

In Ontario, fourteen colleges of applied arts and technology teach native studies through departments of applied arts, liberal arts, social sciences, or continuing education. This pattern has been duplicated by similar institutions in other parts of the country including Manitoba. The number and nature of courses taught at these colleges is determined by the number of native students enrolled and the types of other programs pursued. Usually colleges with a high proportion of native students, and those with social-work oriented courses have the strongest emphasis on native studies. At the same time, the purpose of native studies courses is adapted to the needs of students in terms of their preparation for specific careers. For example, the Northern College of Applied Arts and Technology at South Porcupine in Ontario teaches a Native Studies course consisting of a lecture series given by Grand Council Treaty Number Nine, and also a course in Band Management. On the other hand, the Sheridan College of Arts and Technology at Oakville, Ontario, offers a course in Eskimo sculpture. The three Manitoba Community Colleges located in Winnipeg, Brandon, and The Pas have native studies courses designed to analyse contemporary socio-economic issues affecting native people because of the strong accent of these colleges on community development and social work training.

Most universities in Canada now have courses relating to native studies offered through a variety of existing departments including

anthropology, geography, history, philosophy, religious studies, and sociology. Eleven universities in Ontario follow this system. Of these, Waterloo is the most active, advertising nine courses in anthropology, one in fine arts, eight in history, and one in sociology. The anthropology department of Lakehead University also displays a strong interest in native studies with a claim of ten courses on its calendar. Most other universities in Ontario offer a limited number of courses through one or two departments that have specialized in native studies. With the exception of universities that will be noted later, most post-secondary institutions in Western Canada also fall in this category.

II. Native Studies As An Inter-disciplinary Program

In some universities the native studies program is established along inter-disciplinary lines. A number of specified courses are selected and/or generated from supporting disciplines and offered as an aggregate for a major or minor in native studies. The actual offering of courses and their academic basis is the same as in the category above. However, in this case an actual administration of native studies is set up. It usually comprises of a director and a counsellor. The function of the director is to provide a visible acceptance of the native element on the campus, and he may also teach a course of his specialization. The director has little power to influence the general nature of the program or the academic objectives of courses. By the very nature of this administrative

structure, the intellectual basis of the courses and their method of delivery are under the jurisdiction of the different departments that teach the courses.

The budget needs of a native studies program in this form are rather limited, and are a responsibility of the faculty or college that has administrative control over the program. Funding for the various courses is the responsibility of the departments that teach those courses.

It would appear that the universities of Manitoba, Calgary and British Columbia have pursued this alternative.

III. A Native Studies Department

In a few universities in Canada and the United States, Native Studies is accepted as a separate discipline. This implies methods of investigation that are in some way distinctive. It also suggests that there is a significant body of material which is fit for study at university centres. Proponents of this alternative argue that the past endeavours of native North Americans were undertaken in an environment totally insulated from the influences of the Old World cultures, and that they evolved civilizations which were unlike those outside America. Therefore, in studying those civilizations, it is not only necessary to be prepared to discover a content that is unique, but the methods for its investigation derive from the special orientation of the New World native. In other words, native studies is regarded as a specialized body of knowledge which should be studied as a separate unit.

Universities that have acceded to this point of view create a new department of native studies that is placed under the jurisdiction of a college or school within the university. The department head is generally a native North American, and an effort is made to have as many native faculty members as possible. The native studies department offers a major or minor in the area, and its budget is part of the total budget of the sponsoring college.

In Canada, the following universities have native studies departments: (1) Laurentian University, Onturio - offers a general Bachelor of Arts degree program in Native Studies; (2) Trent University, Ontario - offers a two-year diploma program of undergraduate studies in the field; (3) Brandon University, Manitoba - offers a major and a minor in Native Studies with a special requirement for competency in a native language; and (4) University of Lethbridge, Alberta - offers a major in Native Studies as part of a Bachelor of Arts or Science degree.

GOALS

An investigation of native studies programs reveals concern for a number of goals. Emphasis on any of these goals is matter of local conditions, but generally the following notions are subscribed to, some of them pragmatic and others ideological.

1) It is frequently proposed that the objective of the program is to acquaint students for work among native people. This is particularly evident in the offerings of the colleges of applied arts and technology.

However, many of the universities are also proposing that professional people such as teachers, doctors, lawyers and nurses who wish to pursue careers with a proportion of native clients ought to take native studies courses. Viewed from this point, native studies becomes an investigation of social and psychological conditions affecting a minority group.

2) A number of native and non-native writers have argued that the problem of native society is that of a minority group whose cultural and social traditions have rapidly eroded. The situation is variously described as "an identity problem", "ennui", and "marginality". As a response to this notion, the native studies program is supposed to provide native students with a sense of belonging, a link with the past and present of their race, and an indigenous belief system that would give them ethical moorings.

3) Native studies is also expected to serve another psychological function: enable native students to develop an identification with the formal educational system. To serve this objective, the program is given a degree of political visibility on campus. It has an area where native students can gather for social interaction, have access to a native counsellor to whom they can confide their special problems, and, of course, are taught by a native faculty. Under these circumstances, the native studies program tends to be parochial, and contains a dominant element of social work.

4) As an extension of the theme that native studies is supposed to

serve a present-day problem of practical nature, some colleges and universities go so far as to state that their program is primarily intended for native people. The belief seems to be that the problems of native people are separate and unique, and native studies would provide a forum for their discussion of solution - by native people.

5) Preservation and promotion of the native heritage is mentioned as one of the important objectives of native studies. For this reason, courses in native languages, art forms, and exposition of Indian legends occupy an important place in native studies programs. In many instances, universities require competency in a native language to qualify for a major in the area. A view of native studies on the basis of cultural heritage leads to the recognition that Indian culture is not a homogenous unity. Many native studies programs, therefore, attempt to have a restrictive structure in their offerings to reflect the traditions of dominant native groups in the geographical area served.

6) On another dimension, native studies is described as a subject that merits a status like that of other disciplines in the educational system. Native studies is expected to arouse the interests of those with intellectual curiosity. Furthermore, the residents of North America are supposed to demonstrate a special responsibility in learning about matters pertaining to the indigenous people of the continent. The objective of native studies, according to this line of reasoning, is non-partisan intellectual activity.

..... 9

7) Finally, in a number of cases the native studies program is deisgned as the core of other profession-oriented programs that may be operated for native people by a particular institution. In this case, native studies serves as an unofficial co-ordinator of other native programs, e.g., teacher training, nursing, social work, and para-medical courses.

COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1) Native Studies is marked by a flurry of interest and rapid development. In order to allow this activity to be sustained in a creative manner, it seems essential that there should be a forum for the exchange of ideas and information. On the basis of experience in other subjects, it may be possible to suggest:

A) A Native Studies Periodical - to report on research developments, commentaries on literature being published in the field, and other activities in the subject;

B) Professional Conference - to allow for a gathering of scholars in the field so that they may share views on developments and problems.

2) By virtue of their recent development, and the potential student population that they are expected to serve, native studies programs tend to be small in size. This makes the programs feel rather weak in the total structure of the university or college, and also makes them susceptible to manipulative influences from related fields. For this

..... 10

reason, we suggest that native studies programs should seriously consider the formation of a North American organization with administrative and financial roles that are supported by respective governments. Such an organization could be the beginnings of a native university with a role and character of its own. We further propose that the native studies programs should be identified more closely with other programs specializing with the education of native people. The native studies program at any university or college must be regarded as the ideological and organizational leader of other native programs.

3) Native studies as a subject at colleges and universities is particularly confronted with a dearth of literature. Most of the books and articles in recent years seem to have been produced more in response to market possibilities than as genuine expressions of scholarship. Though the problem will take time to be remedied, assistance should be given to encourage writers and researchers. Both government and industry should be made aware of their responsibility in the area.

4) Native studies programs seem to be inclined towards fuzziness in defining their objectives. Descriptions of their objectives in university calendars are exercises in the arrangement of cliches. We feel that such lack of clarity in defining goals is caused not just by a lack of experience in the discipline and philosophical immaturity, but also by diplomatic considerations. So long as a program does not articulate its pupose in forthright terms, it is less likely to provoke criticism,

and can also bend with the winds of political pressure. However, we believe that unless a native studies program is clearly defined it is not possible to make useful advances either in the accumulation of pertinent knowledge or in the establishment of teaching competence. Native studies programs must be prepared to take more deliberate and courageous decisions on the setting up of new courses and hiring of faculty.

5) Courses now being offered by native studies suffer from two serious problems. First, though a university may list an impressive number of courses in the field, no effort is generally made to establish boundaries of investigation for the courses. Different professors teach the same course with different academic objectives; various courses may have the same content when taught by different faculty. In our experience, heads of native studies programs display little interest in the academic technicalities of course outlines, or the general framework that might be expected to form a philosophical basis for the program. It appears that if good progress is to be made in native studies, there should be greater commitment to the academic aspect of native studies. Efforts should be made to define the general intellectual boundaries of the subject, and courses standardized. The latter condition is necessary to allow for transferability of credit among institutions.

6) An investigation of native studies programs shows clearly that there is a great deal of enthusiasm among students to explore the subject.

Whether this interest ends up as a political overture dressed up in academia, or as a catalyst for cultural renaissance in the native society of North America depends on the ability and seriousness of those involved. The potential is certainly great.